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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 001966

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/15/2018  
TAGS: PGOV PREL ASEC PTER BL  
SUBJECT: BOLIVIA: DIALOGUE DESIRED BUT DOUBTFUL

Classified By: A/DCM Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 b,d

¶1. (C) Publicly, both the opposition and the government say they want to meet for dialogue. As a show of good faith, the opposition has called off regional road blocks. Based on past statements, however, there seems to be little will to compromise. The opposition has said it absolutely requires the return of hydrocarbon tax revenues while President Morales has said that he will not accept any changes to the draft constitution (which currently contradicts the opposition departments' autonomy statutes.) In addition, the government has announced that Pando Prefect Fernandez will be sentenced to 30 years in prison for his alleged role in recent events which left many dead (note: Fernandez has not had a trial and has not been taken into custody in Pando.) Vice President Garcia Linera declared that "murderers are not valid interlocutors" and that the government would not negotiate with Prefect Fernandez.

¶2. (C) The opposition has also stated that a condition for negotiation be that there are no further deaths. Our sources tell us that the opposition fears a crackdown, possibly from the military. Contacts tell the Embassy that the opposition governors (CONALDE) have "no trust" in the government and feel that Evo and his cabinet will not keep his word. We are told that Cossio's September 12 meeting with Vice President Garcia Linera was hostile and filled with threats from the vice president. CONALDE is trying to send a delegation led by Senate President Oscar Ortiz to the UNASUR meeting in Santiago. Opposition contacts have also told us that they have confirmed that one of the MAS-aligned "campesino" combatants in Pando was actually active-duty military (septel). The presence of military forces in a conflict that the government is calling a "genocide" perpetrated by opposition forces against innocent campesinos further damages any confidence the opposition might have had in the government's honesty.

¶3. (C) The government has previously threatened Santa Cruz Prefect Costas with prison for his role in the opposition protests, and many of the opposition leaders have reported receiving threats to themselves and their families. The opposition has recently requested intervention from the

United Nations: the opposition is not as confident in other possible mediators such as the OAS and the Friends Group (Colombia, Argentina, Brazil). Friends' Group leaders, including Argentine President Cristina Kirchner, have recently made statements of "unconditional support" for President Morales and the government. Additionally, the opposition questions OAS impartiality after the OAS gave its approval to the August 10 recall referenda, despite voter roll problems which the OAS team acknowledged it had not had time to investigate.

¶4. (C) Opposition contacts have told us they are trying to get international bodies into Pando so that there is a more impartial source of information than the central government (which is calling the recent deadly conflict "genocide" and has accused the Pando Prefect of "murder".) The central government previously accused Pando Prefect Fernandez of impeding humanitarian assistance to the region; now, however, the central government itself has blocked media and humanitarian groups from entering Pando, fueling opposition fears that some sort of coverup is taking place.

¶5. (C) Comment: Other opposition leaders are watching events in Pando as a precursor to what they may expect in their departments, and the government's accusations and actions are not inspiring confidence. Tarija Prefect Cossio has also stated publicly that his role as a "pre-negotiator" is complicated by the fact that he is representing the four opposition departments of the Media Luna and also, to some extent, Chuquisaca (whose prefect, Sabina Cuellar, broke with the ruling Movement Toward Socialism party and has recently called on President Morales to step down for the good of the country.) Meanwhile, the central government's rejection of mediation offers from Brazil and the Friends Group suggests that the central government is not interested in dialogue. In addition, government-aligned social groups who intend to protest at the Embassy 9/15 have been seen carrying placards calling for "no dialogue" and imprisonment of the prefects: since the social movements often act as a proxy-voice for the central government, this also bodes ill for dialogue. Although both the opposition and the government will continue to make public statements about a desire for dialogue, neither side trusts the other and we anticipate dialogue to fail unless a mutually-trusted international body (such as, possibly, the UN) steps in. End comment.

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